
OBJECTIVE

To have each family member understand that Jesus Christ is the Door to salvation—through Him we enter into everlasting life.

PREPARATION

The committee leading this activity should review and use the *Preparing for the Family Night* checklist in *Appendix B* to plan for the event.

Session leaders should allocate sufficient time to prepare, familiarizing themselves not only with the session but also with each of the following Bible passages: John 10:9, Revelation 3:20, Matthew 7:13–14, and Luke 12:22–34. In addition, look over any prayers that will be used so that you are comfortable with them as well. If theological questions arise during preparation, the leader(s) should schedule a meeting with the parish priest so that the lesson is fully understood before the session.

On the day of the session, allow time to organize the materials.

MATERIALS NEEDED

For the Whole Group

- Copies of prayers and/or prayer services (*for all participants*)
- Flip chart, masking tape, and markers
- A variety of different size boxes ranging from small to very large, numbered with a door cut on the front.
- Random prizes to put in the boxes—the sillier, the better!
- Index cards with prize descriptions
- Icon of Christ
- Door knob signs (*for each participant, can be made out of card stock or bought pre-made out of foam or wood from an art supply store*)
- Decorations for doorknob signs (*sequins, jewels, etc.*)
- Glue
- Something for writing on doorknob sign (*consider paint, puff paint, paint pens, etc. depending on the material of the sign*)
- *Family Time: Closing Activity* handout (*see p. 90*)
- Pens/pencils and paper
- *Family Night: Taking It Home* handouts (*see pp. 91–92*)

For Children's Break-out Session

- Construction paper
- Text for children's book (*see pp. 83–84*)
- Paper icons for children's books
- Markers or crayons
- Hole punch, scissors, glue sticks, and yarn or string

For Teenagers' Break-out Session

- Magazines, glue sticks, markers, and butcher paper

For Adults' Break-out Session

- *Personal and Group Reflection* handout (*see p. 89*)
- Pens/pencils and paper

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OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYERS

We recommend that as a parish family you begin and end your evening with a worship service or prayer. We have included a Small Compline service in Appendix A to reproduce and distribute for all to participate. If you choose a different service, make every effort to have the text available for everyone. For alternative prayer time, teach the families this beautiful psalm. It is important to take a few minutes as a group to review the meaning of this psalm so that all can be active participants when praying. Consult with your parish priest for guidance in this.

Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands! Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations. —Psalm 100

OPENING ACTIVITY: LET'S MAKE A DEAL (15–20 minutes)

Prior to the participants' arrival set up the room with a variety of numbered boxes with doors cut out of them. Put random gifts in each box. Consider finding things in your garage or house that you no longer want—a broken hula hoop, an ugly yard statue, a paper clip, etc. Write a description on an index card of each gift for the leader to use. Make the descriptions as funny as possible. Have one box hidden in the back with an icon of Christ in it. The index card for it should read as follows, "Your family has chosen Door Number _____. You have opened the door to the grandest of all prizes, our Lord, Jesus Christ. By passing through this Door you shall find that all of your needs can be met. By living in union with Christ and in staying faithful to Him, you shall find the most priceless prize of all: the Door to eternal life."

After you have prayed, have the families gather together for the opening activity. Make sure that the person leading this activity is someone who can really have fun with it. A loud, charismatic, and outgoing personality will be most successful. Once everyone is ready, state the following in your own words:

Tonight we are going to play a game—it may be one that many of the adults have heard of. It is called "Let's Make a Deal." When this show was on television, you could win lots of money and prizes. Tonight you won't be leaving here with material prizes but you will leave here with the greatest prize of all, one that will last for eternity.

Here is how we will play the game: I will ask you either a question or for a certain item, and the first family to answer correctly or give me what I need will be allowed to make a deal. You only get one chance at making the deal. I will tell you that many of these prizes are somewhat silly but there is one that is more valuable than gold. Are you ready? LET'S MAKE A DEAL!

Choose questions from the following list, mixing frivolous questions with more serious ones. Keep everyone engaged. Feel free to add your own questions. When it comes time for families to make a deal, give them a choice between two boxes. When they choose, open the door and read the description card and award them their prize. Save the box with Christ in it for last. You need one question per box, so make sure you know the answers to the questions before you begin.

LET'S MAKE A DEAL QUESTIONS

- I am looking for someone who has a paper icon in their wallet or purse.
- Who can tell me which of the 12 major Feast Days we celebrate this month?
- I need a clean tissue. The first family to give me one will be able to make a deal.
- I am looking for someone whose shoes are mostly a color other than black, brown, or white.
- Can someone tell me what the Gospel reading was last Sunday?
- Which family can sing all of the words to our church hymn?
- Who has more than 10 doors in their house?
- Who has their baptismal cross on?
- Who ate breakfast together as a family this morning?
- Who can bring me a penny? The one with the year closest to the current one wins. (*If there are ties, flip a coin.*)

When everyone has made their deal and Christ has been revealed, proceed to the follow discussion questions.

DISCUSS (*Look first to the children for answers and reflect back.*)

- What is the purpose of a door?
- What Door leads to everlasting life?
- In the Bible, Jesus says, "I am the **door**. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9). What do you think He means by this? (*Allow several people to answer before beginning the opening remarks.*)

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OPENING REMARKS *(Paraphrase in your own words.)*

Very good answers! Before we move on, I want to make sure you remember what Jesus said. Let's all read it together:

Write John 10:9 on a flip chart or project on the wall for all to see. Have everyone recite the passage in unison. If you like, have a quick contest to see who can recite it the loudest—the adults or the children.

Jesus tells us, "I am the Door ..." meaning that through Him we can find salvation and attain eternal life with Him. By entering this Door, the Kingdom of Heaven is opened to us. In life we encounter many doors, some of which may be locked and others simply closed. Some doors lead to darkness and emptiness. Jesus will always be the Door that opens to light and fulfillment. This is what we will be exploring today—entering eternal life through Christ. Before we move on, let's see who remembers what Jesus said. *(Say the following and allow participants to fill in the blanks.)*

"I am the _____. If anyone enters by Me, he will be _____, and will go in and out and find _____."

BREAK-OUT SESSIONS *(45–60 minutes)*

Three age-appropriate break-out sessions are offered on the following pages. These may or may not work for your parish, depending on the number of families that participate. If you are not able to break into three groups, keep participants together and adapt one of the sessions to best meet your needs.

- Children's Break-out Session—Knock, Knock! *(pp. 81–84)*
- Teenagers' Break-out Session—The Narrow Gate *(pp. 85–86)*
- Adults' Break-out Session—Opening Doors *(pp. 87–89)*

Transitioning smoothly from one activity to the next is critical when leading a session, especially for young children. For this reason, make sure to know exactly where each group is going for the break-out sessions and who is leading them. Give clear instructions and proper support so the lessons can begin promptly.

Please note that the children's and teenagers' groups will vary greatly in age, as well as in developmental and spiritual levels. If there are many children, it would be best to split the preschoolers through 2nd graders into one group and the 3rd through 6th graders into another. Likewise with the teenagers, split the junior high and high school students into two groups when appropriate. However the groups are arranged, make sure that all the young people are fully engaged in the lesson. For more specific information about the developmental needs of children and teenagers, see the *Guidelines* published by the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (www.youth.goarch.org). Above all, always be certain there is enough adult supervision to ensure that the young people will be safe and supported in their learning.

CLOSING ACTIVITY (15–20 minutes)

Reassemble the participants back together as families. Give each family group a Family Time: Closing Activity handout. Have them follow the instructions on the handout, and when most families are done (they can continue at home if necessary) begin the wrap-up discussion.

DISCUSS (Look first to the children for answers and reflect back.)

- What did you learn today?
- What are you going to do as a family when you get home?
- Does anyone remember the passage about Jesus we learned earlier? (Repeat as a group.)

WRAP-UP (Paraphrase in your own words.)

Jesus is the Door to eternal life. This Door is always unlocked for us and awaiting our entry. But sometimes opening the door is hard. Fr. Anthony Coniaris shares the following story:

Someone once said that man's heart is like a garden, a secret garden which God has kept uniquely for Himself. That garden is locked like a safe deposit box. It has two keys as does every safe deposit box. God has one key. Man has the other key. Hence not even God can get in without man's consent. God's key—the key of His love and power—is already in the lock. Man's key—which is our free will—is not yet in the lock. God is waiting for us to insert our keys to open the box ...

—Taken from Daily Vitamins for Spiritual Growth Vol. 2 by Anthony Coniaris

We need to open our hearts and minds to Jesus Christ to walk through the Door to eternal life! May God help us to live our lives for Him. As we leave here let us remember His words: "I am the **door**. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9).

AS FAMILIES PREPARE TO LEAVE

- Remember to close with a short worship service or closing prayer.
- Don't forget to give families the *Family Night: Taking It Home* handout.
- Let them know when the next Family Night is scheduled.
- Enlist families to help you clean up (*rotate monthly*).
- Thank them sincerely for their attendance and participation.

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KNOCK, KNOCK!

CHILDREN'S BREAK-OUT SESSION

OPENING ACTIVITY: WHO'S THERE?

Knock, knock.

Who's there?

Doris.

Doris who?

Doris locked, that's why I had to knock!

I love knock-knock jokes. Who can share with me a favorite knock-knock joke?

Allow as many children to share their jokes as possible before proceeding with the lesson.

STATE (Paraphrase in your own words.)

The fun thing about knock-knock jokes is the surprise of who or what is on the other side of the door. Usually we know what to expect when we go through a door, such as when entering our bedrooms. Other times, we may enter through a door and have no idea what to expect, like when starting a new school. Let's think about what we might find when we go through different doors.

DISCUSS (Allow all to share and reflect back.)

- What do you find when you go through the door to your home?
- What do you find when you go through the door to a toy store?
- What do you find when you go through the church's doors?

STATE (Paraphrase in your own words.)

We go in and out of many doors in our lives. When we enter our homes, we probably know what we are going to experience. When we enter the door of a toy store, we probably experience more things than we can imagine—aisles upon aisles of toys waiting to be played with. When we enter the door to church, there is so much to take in—far more than the toy store. But sometimes we don't understand what is there before us. For example: (*insert an example from your church—such as “has anyone seen the icon of St. John the Baptist? What is different about this icon? There is a platter with his head on it at the bottom. Has anyone ever noticed this or wondered why?”*) There are many things to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch when we walk into church. But even though we walk through this door every Sunday, sometimes we forget to look around, ask questions, and learn. Open doors allow passage; by opening the door of our heart, we allow Jesus to enter our lives.

BIBLE PASSAGE: REVELATION 3:20

Let's see what the Bible says. This passage is from Revelation, which is the last book of the New Testament. It is different than the other New Testament books as it talks about the future. It is a prophecy written by St. John the Apostle. This is a book we don't read very often because it can be very difficult to understand unless you know the rest of the Bible very well, but today we are just going to look at one verse. In this book, Jesus says:

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Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

DISCUSS (*Allow all to share and reflect back.*)

- What is Jesus saying?

STATE (*Paraphrase in your own words.*)

Jesus is knocking at our door—He wants us to let Him in. When we let Jesus into our lives, we will begin to learn wonderful things about Him. Today, we are going to make a book of some of the different things that help us open the door to Christ. The first and the last pages are somewhat prepared for you. But on the other pages you can write things you see when you open the door to Christ. For example, I might write, “Knock, knock! Who’s there? Prayer—prayer lets me talk to God.” Then I might draw a picture of me praying or even glue an icon on the page. Let’s think of some of the different things that would help us open the door to Christ.

Allow children a chance to answer and supplement your own answers.

ACTIVITY: MAKE A BOOK

Have someone assist you so the materials are set up and ready as soon as you are finished with the lesson. Each child’s book should include the title page, page 1, final page, and end provided on pp. 83-84. Encourage children to draw pictures and paste icons in their book on the inside pages.

WRAP-UP (*Paraphrase in your own words.*)

Today we learned ways we can open and enter the Door to salvation—Jesus Christ. In doing this we live with Him and learn about Him each and every day.

Before closing with prayer have each child share something they learned today.

Close with the following prayer:

Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands! Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations. —Psalm 100

*Make enough copies of these for all the children, and cut into strips
so that they can paste them in their books.*

Title page:

Knock, Knock!

Page 1:

Knock, knock! Who's there?

Christ, the Door to Life!

*I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be
saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*

—John 10:9

Individualized pages:

Knock, knock! Who's there?

Knock, knock! Who's there?

Knock, knock! Who's there?

Individualized pages continued:

Knock, knock! Who's there?

Knock, knock! Who's there?

Final page of story:

Knock, knock! Who's there?

Christ, the Door to Life!

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

—Revelation 3:20

End:

The End

THE NARROW GATE

TEENAGERS' BREAK-OUT SESSION

OPENING DISCUSSION: THE NARROW ENTRANCE

Most doors we encounter are about the same size unless you are speaking of a children's playhouse or large warehouse. The size of most doors is such that most people can enter without any great difficulty.

- Where can different doors lead us?
- Has anyone ever tried to enter through a door that was difficult to pass through? If so, what made it difficult?
- If I told you that you needed to go through the door of one of the boxes from our earlier activity, which one would you choose?
- Why would you choose this box?
- Why didn't you choose the one with the icon of Christ under it?

BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 7:13–14

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

DISCUSS (*Allow all to share and reflect back.*)

- What is this passage telling us?
- What is the “narrow gate”?
- What does this mean to our lives?

STATE (*Paraphrase in your own words.*)

In our lives, there are different gates to enter—many choices to make that lead us down different paths. The choices that are the best for us take some effort. Most of us would like to have an easy life with little or no responsibilities. But this type of easy life leads us nowhere. Imagine if no one went to school! That might sound fun at first, but fooling around all day would not give you the same rewards you would get from learning, finding your vocation, and contributing to society. Just as we need to put effort into our education, we need to put effort into our spiritual life. Everywhere in television, magazines, movies, and billboards, we have popular culture telling us what is good for us—money, power, and good looks. These advertisements try to lead us toward the “wide gate,” but we, as Christians, know that their rewards are temporary and often empty. Christian rewards are meaningful and eternal. Sometimes it is hard to remember to keep our focus on an Orthodox Christian lifestyle when the world screams at us to follow a different path.

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY: NARROW GATE COLLAGE

Break the young people into groups with 3–4 people. Give each group several magazines (make sure content in the magazines is appropriate), a large sheet of butcher paper, glue sticks, and markers. Then state the following in your own words:

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Divide your paper in half. Label one side “The Wide Gate” and the other “The Narrow Gate.” You will be making a collage using pictures and words from the magazines or writings and/or drawings of your own. Place them under the appropriate column. When you finish, you will share your collage with the whole group.

DISCUSS (*Allow all to share and reflect back.*)

- What are some of the things you placed under the wide gate?
- Why did you put them there?
- What are some of the things you placed under the narrow gate?
- Why did you put them there?
- What makes entering the narrow gate hard?
- What things can help us enter the narrow gate?

WRAP-UP (*Paraphrase in you own words.*)

God gives us many blessings and gifts here on earth. Most of all, He gives us His never-ending love. He is standing at the door waiting for us to enter. He loves us and wants us to experience this love in our lives and pass it on to everyone we come in contact with—even when it is difficult to not follow the crowd. Take the “narrow path.” Go through the door. God promises you won’t regret it!

Close with the following prayer:

Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands! Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations. —Psalm 100

OPENING DOORS

ADULTS' BREAK-OUT SESSION

OPENING ACTIVITY: DO WHAT YOU CAN

Today we are learning about how Christ is the Door to everlasting life. Through Him we enter, but how do we approach the Door? What things keep us from approaching the Door? We want to begin today by having you silently read and reflect on a short article. You will have five minutes to do so, and then we will discuss it.

Pass out the Reflection handout (p. 88). Give the groups five minutes to silently read the article and reflect on the following questions before beginning the discussion below.

DISCUSS (*Allow all to share and reflect back.*)

- Do our interests and goals have Christ in them? If they don't, why not?
- Are there things in your life that you think you need before you can open the door to Christ?
- How can we keep our focus on Christ and the door and avoid the barriers that take us away from eternal life?
- Christ and His Church want us to strive toward salvation. We are given the sacraments and many liturgical services. How can we open doors by being active instead of passive participants in the liturgical life of the church?

STATE (*Paraphrase in your own words.*)

It is a struggle each and every day to keep our focus on Christ. There are so many things to distract us that we are told are "important." But Christ has an answer for this in the Gospel of Luke when He states:

BIBLE PASSAGE: LUKE 12:22–34

Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith?"

"And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the

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world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.
“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

DISCUSS (*Allow all to share and reflect back.*)

- What is Christ telling us in this passage?
- How should it impact our lives?

WRAP-UP (*Paraphrase in your own words.*)

Fr. Anthony Coniaris writes about a concept called “planned neglect.”

A wise person conserves time through planned neglect. When asked the secret of her marvelous success with the violin, the young concert artist replied, “Planned neglect.” She explained, “When I began the study of music there were many things that always demanded my time. Going to my room after breakfast, I made my bed, dusted my room, arranged my things on the dresser, and did whatever else would make my room neat and attractive. After I had finished these tasks, I turned to my violin. I soon discovered that that system would keep me from forever becoming a good violinist. So I deliberately planned to neglect everything else each day until my practice piece was completed.”

—Taken from Daily Vitamins for Spiritual Growth Vol. 1 by Anthony Coniaris

Plan to make Christ the priority in your lives and the lives of your family members. Plan to neglect all other things until you have put Christ first in all that you do. In doing this, you will begin to learn the true priorities in life and open the Door to eternity. Take the next five minutes to silently assess your priorities.

After five minutes have passed, close with the following prayer:

Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands! Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is

good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations. —Psalm 100

PERSONAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

DO WHAT YOU CAN?

REV. ANDREW DEMOTSES

I have often found myself wishfully thinking that if I ever won the lottery, I would be able to endow the church and help the needy. In my more reflective moments, however, I realize that it is a mistake to think that I would do more if only I had more money, or more time, or more talent. For most of us, this is merely an excuse for doing nothing. Instead of dreaming about what I would do if I had a million dollars, my time would be more productively spent doing the best I can with what I already possess. If we don't do our best with our present gifts, why do we think that we would do better if we had even more?

We also need to remember that how we give is as important as what we give. It is for this reason that the gift of the widow's mite was more earnestly praised and valued by Jesus than was the gold piece of the wealthy man. It was given with greater sincerity of motive and certainly represents far greater sacrifice. In the parable of the gold coins, moreover, Christ assures us that being faithful in "small matters" opens the door to greater opportunities.

Very few of us can give thousands of dollars to advance the work of the kingdom of God or send large sums of money to help feed starving children. But if everyone else used that as a reason and excuse for not giving at all, then nothing good would ever happen. No matter how generous the wealthy may be, every good cause continues to depend on the small but steady stream of gifts from those who cannot give much, but are nonetheless moved to give what they can.

We also need to remember that not every gift is measured as money; perhaps your gift could be to teach a church school class or to sing in the choir. It is not as important how much we give as it is to be faithful in giving what we can. If you are faithful in this way, it may be that God will offer greater opportunity and capacity. Remember also that if you are not generous with a small income, you are not likely to be generous with a large one. —excerpt taken from www.goarch.org

At first glance, this article may just seem like it deals with financial stewardship. In actuality, this is just one example of ways we delay opening the door to Christ. We think we just need to get a little more money, finish up with our big work project, get through family obligations at Christmas, or a million other things, and then we will refocus ourselves on Christ. Consider the following questions:

- How do we allow finances and work demands to take us away from opening the door to Christ?
- How do our educational demands for ourselves and our family members take us away from opening the door to Christ?
- How do family and social obligations and pressures take us away from opening the door to Christ?
- Do our interests and goals have Christ in them, and if they don't, why?

FAMILY NIGHT: TAKING IT HOME

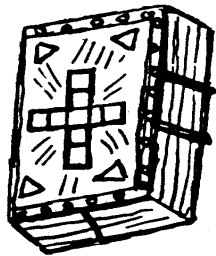
“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” —John 10:9

PRAY TOGETHER

Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands! Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.

—Psalm 100



MORE ON DOORS

<i>... everlasting doors!</i>	<i>Psalm 24:7</i>
<i>... standing at the door ...</i>	<i>James 5:9</i>
<i>... I have set before you an open door ...</i>	<i>Revelation 3:8</i>

Want to find more?

Grab your Bible and concordance and look up the word “door” or anything else you want to look for.

FEATURED ARTICLE: HOW TO LOOK FOR THE LORD

BY REV. FR. MICHAEL TERVO

Once a wise man showed a young boy a nut. The wise man asked, “What do you see?” The boy answered, “A nut!” The wise man said, “Try again.” The boy tried again: “It is something that will become a tree.” Finally the wise man said, “Nice try, but you’re wrong. I see what will become an entire forest!”

That nut could have become a number of things: a seedling, a tree, several trees, or even an entire forest. The wise man tested this boy to see if he was able to look beyond appearances and to see what a thing can become. In essence, he tested the boy’s very ability to see. This was the wise man’s point: with the right attitude one can see that sometimes within the smallest things can be found the greatest potential.

Christians know, love, and live by the word potential. A Christian strives to see the world around him in the fullest way—not only how things are but what they can become. Thus, what appears to be small may hide large meaning. And the large things, even the large things that dominate our lives, aren’t necessarily as big as they seem.

On February 2nd, we in the Orthodox Church celebrate the feast of the Presenta-

tion of the Lord into the Temple. The Virgin Mother and Joseph, a humble couple from a humble town, take Jesus to the temple along with something to offer as a sacrifice of thanks to God. While in the temple the couple presents the child to a very old man.

The old man’s name was Symeon. Upon seeing the baby Jesus, he rejoices and says a rather strange thing:

“Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.”

While most people would have seen only a helpless little baby, Symeon saw this baby Jesus as the Lord, God, and Savior. Why could Symeon see differently? First, through a promise that he would not die before seeing the Savior, God prepared Symeon for this moment. When God wants to be seen, He will be seen. Second, Symeon desired to see his Savior in whatever form He would take—even in the form of the little baby Jesus. Symeon allowed him-

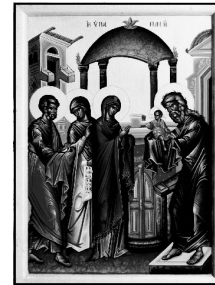
self, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to see Jesus for what he really was and would become—the Savior of all mankind. He saw differently because he wanted to and tried to.

The Bible says that because Symeon was a “righteous

man” he would be able to see the Lord Jesus. Symeon wasn’t righteous because he never sinned. Nor did the Bible call him righteous because he followed exactly every rule of his faith—though he probably tried to do so. He was called a “righteous man” because he looked forward to the coming of Christ!

Like Symeon, search for God’s presence in your life in ways you’ve never thought before. When you find Him, give thanks to God for his presence and the blessings that He has given you. Invite him to be even more present in your life. This is the best form of worship that you can give to God. Search patiently and expect to find God. You will not be disappointed.

—Fr. Michael Tervo is a priest serving in the San Francisco Metropolis.



FAMILY ACTIVITY: THE HOSPITALITY OF ABRAHAM

Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said." So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate. — *Genesis 18:1-8*



Abraham and Sarah opened their home to three strangers (who were actually the Holy Trinity). As a family, open your home to someone new to your community or perhaps someone who doesn't have much family around. Get everyone in your family involved in the planning and execution. Have children make an invitation to send if you like.

Come up with a menu together and let each family member take charge or part of the preparations (remember this

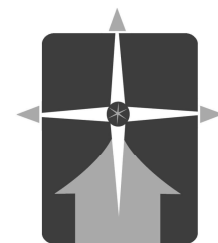
is the hospitality of your family, not mom). Plan the dinner but also plan an activity to do with your honored guest(s). Don't forget to put someone in charge of leading the prayer before and after the meal. Make your guests feel honored and a part of your family!

FAMILY CHALLENGE

When we open doors, our view changes. When we open the doors to our church, some of the most beautiful things that come into view are icons. We challenge you this month to learn more about the icons in your home and in our church. Take time to look at them. Find answers to questions you have about them, and how they help us open the door to Christ.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- *The Open Door: Entering the Sanctuary of Icons and Prayer* by Frederica Matthews-Green published by Paraclete Press.
- *Paradise on Your Doorstep* by Fr. Anthony Coniaris published by Light and Life Publishing (www.light-n-life.com).
- *Come and See Icons* website offers beautiful icon prints for ordering but also provides the visitor with a complete description of each icon (www.comeandseeicons.com).



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